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ABSTRACT

An overview of research regarding mid-level administrators' careers is presented, and research topics and strategies for studying career opportunities are proposed. The review focuses on how mid-level administrators' careers are studied and the purposes of those studies. From research completed between 1969 and 1985, 30 studies about mid-level administrators' careers were selected for review. Content was coded to identify the research questions, design, procedures, and results. The review found that the careers of mid-level administrators were largely unexplored. While profiles of these administrators are available, little is known about the career opportunities for mid-level administrators and the quality of work life. In addition to new directions and innovative approaches, future research must build on theory and be reputable and practical. Future directions for research are suggested, with attention to the following areas: organizational structures and processes, career patterns and mobility, career development, intracareer analyses and comparisons, and new methodological approaches. For each of the 30 studies, a chart identifies administrative areas, the methodology, sites/target group, sample size, gender, and variables reviewed. (SW)

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HEAD COUNTING, HILL CLIMBING, AND BEYOND: THE STATUS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS' CAREERS

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Paper presented at the Association for
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HEAD COUNTING, HILL CLIMBING AND BEYOND: THE STATUS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS FOR RESEARCH ON MID-LEVEL ADMINISTRATORS CAREERS

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During the past two decades, mid-level administrators became essential for governing and managing higher education. Today, they carry substantial responsibility for developing and implementing policy, coordinating resources and activities, supporting academic functions, and serving as liasons to a variety of constituents such as faculty, students, business and industry, and government. Concommitantly, their numbers increased exponentially. Between 1968 and 1976 the number of administrators in U.S. higher education grew nearly 150 percent, while the number of faculty increased approximately 33 percent. Today, the ratio of administrators to faculty on campuses varies approximately from one-two to one-five (Chronicle of Higher Education, October 3, 1983) and the majority of the administrators hold mid-level positions (broadly defined as administrative staff below the vice-presidential and decanal levels).

However, opportunities for administrative career advancement are now constrained (Austin and Gamson, 1983). Job mobility, the principal mechanism both for increasing employees' earnings, authority and enhancing status (Kanter, 1977) has decreased because of job freezes, few new positions, and few retirements. Declining enrollments and revenues coupled with high

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inflation resulted in minimal growth or some contraction in the number of administrative positions (Mortimer and Tierney, 1979). Mid-level administrators' perceptions of low career opportunity, in turn, are causing talented individuals to leave academe. In two studies, one-third of the samples of new professionals left higher education within six years after starting their first job (Burns, 1982; Holmes, Verrier, and Chisolm 1983). Paradoxically, these conditions which limit career opportunity (chances for professional growth and advancement), and thus adversely affect employee motivation, performance (Rosenbaum, 1984) and retention are the same ones that require a high level of employee motivation and performance to maintain the vitality of a college or university.

It is my view that we, in higher education, must turn our attention to improving career opportunities such as advancement and quality of work life for mid-level administrators. However, this attention should be based upon a solid foundation of research. That is necessary if we are to be most effective in enhancing the professional lives of individual administrators and for meeting human resource requirements. The intent of my paper is to sketch an overview of recent research regarding mid-level administrators careers and to stimulate discussion about future research agendas. First, I will highlight the questions I studied. Second, I will describe the forms in which they were studied. Third, I will propose topics in need of research and different strategies that can be used for studying career opportunities. A systematic and thorough review of research on the careers of mid-level administrators was conducted to address the following questions:

1. How were mid-level administrators' careers studied?

2. What were the purposes of studies of mid-level administrators' careers?

Research completed between 1969 and 1985 was selected for inclusion in this review. Two approaches were used to locate resources. First, ten relevant higher education journals covering that period were selected. Second, an extensive computerized literature search including books, articles, and ERIC documents was conducted. Each source was read to identify theoretically grounded or research oriented works. A total of 30 studies about the careers of mid-level administrators emerged from the hundreds of accounts of administrative experiences and careers in higher education. Each study was then reviewed and content coded to identify the research question(s), design, procedures, and results. Further, findings for each study were recorded and examined.

How Were the Careers of Mid-level Administrators Studied?

Some studies focused on mid-level administrators as a discernable subcategory within a larger sample (Van Alstyne, et al, 1977; Frances and Mensel, 1981, Ingraham, 1968; Curby, 1980; Moore, 1983; Moore and Sagaria, 1982; Sagaria, 1983). In other research, mid-level administrators careers were compared with those of senior-level administrators (Scott, 1978, Moore and Sagaria, 1982, Sagaria and Moore, 1983) or with university service employees (Wheeles, Podeszwa and Serpento, 1982). Studies also focused exclusively on mid-level

administrators (Bess and Lodahl, 1969; Austin, 1984, 1985; Miner and Estler, 1985). Lastly, the largest number of studies documented the career experiences of administrators in specialized areas such as student affairs (Burns, 1982; Kuh, Evans, and Duke, 1983; Harter, Modem, and Wilson, 1982; Rosen, Taube and Wadsworth, 1980), admissions (Whitmire, 1978), financial aid (Davis, 1983), and placement (Crouch and Tolle, 1982).

The survey method was the predominant mode for obtaining information about the careers of mid-level administrators. The vast majority of the studies (90 percent) employed mail questionnaires. Generally, these studies gathered self-reported career history data from either incumbents in selected positions and/or institutions, or members of particular professional organizations. However, there is one major exception to using self-reported data. The two College and University Personnel Association studies (Van Alstyne, et al, 1977; Frances and Mensel, 1981) directly solicited information from the colleges and universities about administrators they employed. Similar data were obtained from 1,222 college and universities in 1975-76 and again in 1978-79 to determine employment patterns and hiring processes.

Interviews, although rarely used, have been important for studying the careers of mid-level administrators. Scott (1979) queried 200 administrators, faculty, and search committee chairpersons at 18 colleges about the work experiences and opportunities of mid-level administrators. Stringer (1977) interviewed individuals holding "assistant to" positions and their supervisors in one university and developed a typology of the "assistant to" position along with implications for a administrative career.

What Were the Purposes of the Studies?

An analysis of the research questions and the results yielded three general categories for classifying the purposes of the research, head counting, hill climbing, and beyond. Head counting included studies with a major emphasis on demographics or personal, educational, and professional profiles of incumbents. Hill climbing included studies with a major emphasis on describing career patterns and characteristics, mobility, and turnover trends. Beyond included studies with a major emphasis on conceptualizing and testing theories about careers and mobility, career influences, and the consequences of career experiences. These three categories are intended to identify major research directions and to serve as the organizing scheme for reviewing research. Therefore, the several studies that contained more than one major research thrust were placed in more than one category.

Head Counting

Forty percent of the studies were categorized as head counting because they devoted significant attention to describing various characterisitcs of individuals and positions. As a result, a vivid composite (age, gender, race and marital status) exists of what mid-level administrators look like. It is known where they have come from (birth state and educational background) and what they do (positions they hold, the kinds of institutions where they work, and what their work activites and functions are). Considerable information is available about where men and women and majority and minority members are employed both by positions and institution types. Insights are also available

regarding their lack of faculty status. Moreover, studies produced information regarding job characteristics. These studies generated important baseline data that can help guide the examining and understanding of more complex phenomena regarding the careers of mid-level administrators.

Hill Climbing

Hill climbing accounted for another 40 percent of the studies. These studies shared common features of describing job sequences and employment trends. Aside from that, the work differed markedly in sophistication and complexity. The most basic designs generated data regarding the position antecedent to a current position. The studies also indicated whether a person came to his or her current position from within or outside the employing institution. Moreover, many studies reported length of time in current position.

More eleborate studies typically included job change patterns such as rates of changes and kinds of changes which were then cross tabulated by gender, race, age, type of institution, and faculty status. A few studies compared mid-level administrators among specialty areas such as academic affairs student affairs, business affairs, and external affairs. Others considered hiring candidates for new positions, internal hiring, and changes in hiring and recruitment patterns, over time. These more complex studies are few in number. Nonetheless, they contributed considerable insights about career opportunities and the impact of affirmative action and retrenchment on the careers of mid-level administrators.

Furthermore, in several of the better studies, researchers studied target populations which included both senior-level and mid-level positions (Van Alstyne, et al, 1977; Frances and Mensel; 1981 Moore, 1983) from which information about career opportunities for mid-level administrators is then inferred. Unfortunately, in the two College and University Association studies (Van Alstyne, et al, 1977 and Frances and Mensel, 1981) as well as the Moore study (1983), mid-level managers were a secondary concern. Consequently, as a result of sampling decisions favoring senior-level administrators, the information derived from these studies about mid-level administrators is somewhat limited to those at the level of director (such as financial aids or housing), affirmative action officer, and book store manager.

Beyond

The beyond category--conceptualizations of careers and mobility, explanations of career influences, and the consequences of various experiences account for slightly less than one-third of the studies. A primary concern of these works was to go beyond descriptions of jobs held or demographic sketches to offer explanations of career variations. This was accomplished by incorporating career data with information about other aspects of mid-level administrators' work lives (Bess and Lodahl, 1969; Scott 1978; Curby, 1980; Austin, 1985). Other studies offered insights through the use of conceptual frameworks or models (Sagaria and Moore, 1983; Sagaria, 1984; Austin, 1984). Especially noteworthy for advancing the understanding of the career opportunities of mid-level administrators is the Miner and Estler (1985) scholarship about evolving jobs (mobility through responsibility accrual). Such as conceptual

break through provides a useful alternative for viewing careers as sequences of job changes. Moreover, it offers a plausible model about how some mid-level administrators advance professionally. Alternatively, the evolving job model explains an informal organizational approach for rewarding and retaining mid-level administrative talent.

This research review indicates that the careers of mid-level administrators is largely unexplored. With the exception of important data regarding demographics and occassional studies using detailed job histories of large representative samples, little is actually known about the career opportunities of mid-level administrators. A mere glimpse at the writing about their careers indicates that conventional wisdom or holding an administrative appointment appears to be the sole requisite for writing about mid-level administrators. Many of the more effective studies that exist were modeled upon the investigations of work and careers from the private or public sectors. Moreover, the concepts, research questions, and general quality of the investigatory process hampered the advancement of knowledge about the careers of mid-level administrators. In short, a major, systematic effort should be undertaken.

Future Directions for Research

After reviewing studies of research and grounding them within the context of the larger body of literature about mid-level administrators and higher education organizations I would like to advance several new directions for future research.

1. Organizational Structures and Processes. It is generally held that one's formal and informal positions in a hierarchical organization determine career prospects and mobility (Kanter, 1977). Research is needed which focuses on the characteristics and processes of colleges and universities and relates them to career outcomes. Major efforts are required to determine how organizational conditions such administrative configurations, personnel policy and procedures, and turnover shape opportunities for growth and development. Moreover, these should be considered in conjunction with informal characteristics such as networks, visibility, centrality of job activities, and proportion of individuals with similarly ascribed characteristics.

2. Career Patterns and Mobility. Studies of administrator mobility provide convincing evidence that most job changes occur within institutions rather than between them (Scott, 1978; Moore and Sagaria, 1982; Moore, 1983). Research is needed to examine career advancement in the setting in which it occurs. This will require focusing upon both how people move between jobs as well as the sequence of administrative and professional positions within a higher education organization. Moreover, inquiry is needed to achieve deeper insights and richer explanations about how human resource decisions are made. Furthermore, it is important for understanding what factors enable a person to move from a mid-level admininstrative position to a senior-level position. Conversely, research is needed for determining the extent to which mid-level managers leave higher education and reasons why they leave.

3. Career Development. Despite the fact that traditional opportunities for

advancement are limited for mid-level administrators, studies indicated that mid-level administrators are relatively satisfied and highly motivated (Solomon and Tierney, 1977; Austin, 1984). Probing analyses are required to ascertain whether mid-level administrators' attitudes toward their career opportunities are indeed favorable. Recent down turns in the financial health of many colleges and universities as well as the low morale of faculty on many campuses cast serious doubts about mid-level administrators attitudes toward their careers and work. Further, research is needed which uses theories of adult development to frame the experience of mid-level administrators. This approach has the potential for understanding career and work needs as well as anchoring them within individual lives. Moreover, such an account may increase comprehension about the changing needs of an aging group of employees and racial and gender differences.

4. Intracareer Analyses and Comparisons. There is a tendency to generalize about careers from information about a few positions or administrative specialities to mid-level administrators in the aggregate. Yet there is minimal justification for doing so. For example what common experiences do an academic advisor, budget analyst and assistant to a dean have? Studies focusing on the work and experiences of individuals in specific positions are necessary for identifying commonalities for potential mobility patterns or linkages between jobs. Moreover, such investigations are important early steps for determining training needs and planning innovative work arrangements such as job rotation and internships. These studies also may function as the basis for enhancing professional identity of mid-level administrators and

cultivating alliances among the various professional associations representing administrative interests. Studies are also needed to compare the career experiences of mid-level administrators in higher education with the experiences of their counterparts in other kinds of organizations. Such studies may lead to more robust theories and effective intervention strategies than are likely to be developed by focusing exclusively on academe.

5. New Methodological Approaches. These proposals for research call for diversifying the approaches used for studying the careers of mid-level administrators. Qualitive studies including interview and ethnographic approaches are essential for understanding the dynamics of individual careers and the meaning and importance of careers for mid-level administrators. They may also shed light on aspects of professional socialization. Institutional case studies have much promise for comprehending the influences of organizational growth and contraction, networks, and position visibility and centrality on career opportunities. Lastly, analyzing institutional records is perhaps the most obvious and underutilized approach for understanding careers. My own current research at The Ohio State University indicates that personnel records tend to be standardized, accurate and they are more thorough than much self-reported job history data. Moreover, personnel records permit both cross sectional and longitudinal studies. Furthermore, salary data are an especially useful indicator of career advancement.

In conclusion, research about the careers of mid-level administrators is in the formative stages. We have a vivid profile of mid-level administrators,

but we can say little about an individual's probability of advancing or what his or her quality of work life may be, despite the fact that these variables do influence an employee's satisfaction and contribution to an organization. Significant new directions and innovative approaches are needed. Equally important, future research must build more effectively upon theory and salient antecedents. Finally, but most critical, research must be both reputable and practical. It must be directed to solving problems, improving human resource staffing requirements, and assisting employees make informed career choices. In short there is much to be done!

Studies of Mid-level Administrators' Careers

Study	Administrative Areas	Method	Site(s) Target Group	Sample Size	Gender	Variables Reviewed
Austin (1984)	all non-academic areas	survey/interview	1 university	260	M&F	work role & career, commitment, autonomy, pride, recognition, prestige
Austin (1985)	all non-academic areas	survey	1 university	260	M&F	age, gender, years employed, work commitment, opportunities for career movement
Bess & Lodahl (1969)	admissions, student personnel, university relations, registrar, institutional research & financial aid	survey/descriptive	17 universities	69	M	age, education, finding jobs job change, career decisions, & satisfaction
Burns (1982)	student affairs	survey/descriptive	M.A. and Ph.D. graduates from 2 universities	305	M&F	age, education, gender, work values, opinions, salary, reason for leaving field
Chapman & Urbach (1984)	admissions	survey/descriptive	1,065 universities	998	M&F	career entry advancement, future plans, skills & abilities
Crouch & Tolle (1982)	placement directors	survey/descriptive	U.S. universities 4- and 2-year colleges	3130	M&F	age, gender, education, years of experience, faculty status, salary, institutional data, & functions
Davis (1983)	financial aid	survey/descriptive	association membership	2440	M&F	gender, age, & ethnicity
Frances & Mensel (1981)	all administrative areas senior & mid-level administrators	survey/descriptive, trend	universities, 4-year & 2-year colleges	1,222 institutions	M&F	age, gender, institution type, employment patterns, turnover, time in position, salary, inside hiring

Harder (1982)	student affairs	survey/descriptive	association members	104	M&F	age, gender, education, years of experience, & kinds of experiences, career patterns, achievements, aspirations, religious and black institutions
Harter, Modem & Wilson (1983)	student affairs & auxiliary services	survey/descriptive	229 institutions	229	M&F	gender, race, staffing patterns, institutional type
Holmes, Verrier, & Chisolm (1983)	student affairs	survey/descriptive	M.A. graduates from 1 university	131	M&F	employment patterns, and goals, mentor
Hoskins (1978)	not specified	survey/descriptive	predominantly white & predominantly black land grant universities	457	M&F	background characteristics recruitment & retention, promotion & career factors, black/white relations
Ingraham (1968)	all areas	survey/descriptive	877 4-year colleges & universities	6,265	M&F	gender, education, institution type, education & job change
Kuh, Evans, Duke (1983)	student affairs	survey/descriptive	association members	212	M&F	age, gender, title, education, years of experience, areas of responsibility, career patterns
Miner & Estler (1985)	non-teaching professionals & administrators	interview	1 university	14	M&F	ability to influence organizational processes, performance intellectual curiosity, position instability, organizational goals & culture, slack & turbulence
Moore (1983)	all areas line & staff	survey/descriptive	1,600 4 yr colleges & universities	2,896	M&F	age, gender, race, education, new positions, length of time on job, type of institution, current issues & professional readiness for change, reasons for staying in breading

Moore & Sagaria (1981)	all areas	survey/descriptive	4-year colleges & universities in one state	180	F	age, marital status, time in current position, mobility, and anticipated mobility
Moore & Sagaria (1982)	academic affairs line & staff	survey/descriptive	80 colleges & universities	435	M&F	age, marital status, education, faculty status, institutional type, & job change patterns
Rossen, Taube & Wadsworth (1980)	student affairs new professionals	interview	1 university	15	M&F	professional experiences & expectations
Sagaria (1983)	all areas	survey/descriptive	33 4-year colleges & universities	472	M&F	age, gender, race, education, hiring practices, intra-institutional mobility, job activities
Sagaria (1984)	academic affairs	survey/regression	80 4-year colleges & universities	268	M&F	intra-institutional & inter institutional job change, gender, age, professional activities & mentor relationships
Sagaria & Moore (1983)	academic affairs	survey descriptive	80 4-year colleges & universities	234	M&F	age, gender, intra- and interinstitutional job changes job-change rates, anticipated job changes
Scott (1978)	all areas	survey & interview	18 colleges & universities	200 administrators, faculty & search committee chairs		career pattern background training, mobility, & advancement strategies
Scott (1979)	financial aid	survey & interview	18 colleges & universities	200 administrators, faculty & search committee chairs		middle-manager's age, role perceptions, & expectations
Solomon & Tierney (1977)	not specified	survey & interview/ regression	22 liberal arts colleges	211	M&F	role congruence job satisfaction

Stringer (1977)	all areas assistant to	interview	1 university	45	not specified	position typology career patterns, advancement opportunities
Van Alstyne & Withers (1977)	all areas	survey/descriptive	1037 universities, 4- and 2-year colleges		M&F	age, gender, institution type, employment patterns, time in position, salary, inside hiring
Wheeless, Podeszwa & Serpento (1982)	non-teaching staff	survey/descriptive	1 university	535	M&F	gender, race, job change motivation, job satisfaction
Whitmire (1978)	admissions directors	survey/descriptive	association membership	221	M&F	age, gender, race, career patterns & aspirations, authority, responsibility, salary & competencies
Curby (1980)	all areas	survey/descriptive	universities, 4-year & 2-year colleges	1,389	F	age, marital status, education, institution type, mobility factors, propensity to move

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